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# THE TYRANNY OF THE PILL.

BY ELIZABETH BISLAND.

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FIFTY years ago one of the dearest possessions of every well-nurtured, properly mounted home was the "Family Pill." There was also, of course, a well-stocked medicine-closet containing all the simpler drugs and a pair of druggist's scales, and the doctor was called in only for extreme exigencies. If one had an ear-ache a teaspoonful of sweet-oil was warmed over the flame of a candle, three drops of laudanum added—which mamma blended with a convenient hair-pin—the whole mess was decanted into the distressed member, a pledget of cotton batting corked it into place, and that was the end of it. If one was "chilling," cholagogue was administered by the ample tablespoonful, or quinine in powders was got down by the aid of jam. For an unidentified pain in one's little insides which refused to yield to the soothings of a bag of hot salt, the scales weighed out an eighth of a grain of morphine; and castor-oil, "blue-mass" and paregoric were set on the track of most of the flesh's ills and chased each other, and incidentally the ailment, all about one's helpless nineteenth-century interior. But the family pill was the specific relied upon for nine out of ten maladies. It was usually some simple compound, such as calomel, rhubarb and Dover's powders, put together by the booted, hard-riding family doctor to save himself from useless night calls, and each household could produce irrefragable evidence of the almost miraculous potency of its own particular combination.

It may be noted in passing that the family pill was an hereditary treasure and always descended in the female line. Its establishment in a new household was after this fashion: Of course *his* mamma supplied the bridegroom with his due equipment of the compound of his own ancestors and solemnly warned him

to take no other; and equally of course the bride included *her* mamma's medicament among her bridal furnishings. It was in the days that wives vowed to obey, and when Angelina knew her first discomfort she meekly submitted to being dosed with the pill-in-law, piously murmuring that her existence was of so little real moment it hardly mattered if she jeopardized it by using the wrong medicines. But when Edward came down with a cold, or suffered from over-eating, she rose in her might, like a lioness defending her whelps, and declared that, while *she* might palter with her health to please her mother-in-law, Edward's darling existence should be defended by the extremest resources of medical science; her own family pill-box was called into use, and thereafter it dominated the new household without further question. For fifty years ago was a period of slack water. The power of the priest was just about to ebb, and the rising tide of the influence of the physician was hardly yet observed. Since then one has seen very nearly a complete substitution of the domination over the minds of the public of the healer of the body, displacing the shepherd of souls.

One of the odd mediæval survivals of the Catholic Church has been the recent placing upon the Index Expurgatorius of the works of Charles Henry Lea. Mr. Lea has devoted a long, laborious life to writing a record and analysis of the Inquisition, and the curious feature of the episode is that the Church does not perceive that any candid student of Mr. Lea's books must arise from them with a new tolerance and understanding of the origin of the Holy Office, realizing for the first time that the Inquisition had not its origin in mere cruelty and bigotry. The Protestant world has considered that institution heretofore as an almost incredible example of human baseness masquerading in the garments of religion. But the wise student of the history of mankind grows to realize, as the fruit of a faithful study of human behavior, that man in all generations is sincere in his efforts to do right, no matter how hideous and crooked, how blind and mistaken, may have been his fumbings toward his ideals of truth and justice. That the Inquisition was no exception to this rule is the new point of view which Mr. Lea's patient examination demonstrates.

The greatest preoccupation of Europe — once the theory of Christian dogma was generally accepted — was with the health

and salvation of souls, and the organized Church became the official guardian of this way of salvation. As always with official bodies its tendency was inevitably to solidify its power, to organize into a rigid system and to reprobate all opposition to its decrees. It would seem to be impossible for any hierarchy to remain flexible to expansion and growth in its own organism; to yield without a struggle to fresh conceptions of its treasured tenets, and the Christian Church proved no exception to this rule. When the revival of classic letters woke a moral unrest in Europe and aroused questions in thoughtful minds as to the finality of their previous intellectual and ethical decisions, the Church set itself obstinately in opposition to all readjustments. Had it recognized the inevitableness of some change to allow for the play of new needs and new growth, it might have led and directed the readjustment and spared Europe floods of tears and blood. But for the Church to have seen the wisdom of such a course would have been to prove the infallibility it claimed; this being a counsel of perfection to which no priesthood has yet arisen.

On its behalf, however, Mr. Lea shows as its excuse that the moral and mental flux resultant from the inflow of new ideas had upon many the intoxication of madness. No experiment was too fantastic to be tried. Sects sprang up like mushrooms, each outdoing the last in the eccentricity of its creed in the endeavor to find some solution of the new moral and political problems—some clothing large enough for the growing spirit. Unaccustomed liberty of thought led some of these sects so far astray as to threaten the whole fabric of society. The Inquisition in Germany had its origin in the endeavor of the Government to control one of these new religions which professed a complete anarchy, the members displaying the faith that was in them by refusing to wear any clothes at all. It was one of the many pathetic human efforts to return to that mythical state of natural innocence and freedom. The members of the sect firmly resisted all restraints of either love or limbs, and no persuasion inducing them to observe any demands of public decency, the Government seized these literal-minded pre-Adamites and delivered them to the Church to be disciplined.

Looking back upon it now, it is easy to see how proper and reasonable those first attempts to restrain anarchical license seemed to the Church, and how inevitably the power delegated

to it degenerated into the horrors of the later Inquisition. Intoxicated in its turn, it became unable to see that Luther, Erasmus and Calvin were not anarchists, but wise, far-seeing men, who if encouraged instead of persecuted would, far from founding schisms, have slowly pruned off abuses and enlarged the garments of a creed grown too narrow for such thinkers as Bruno and Galileo.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the world had grown to be only mildly interested in its soul, and to be considerably more concerned about the health of its body. Gradually the power and influence of the priesthood has drifted into the hands of the doctors. For the tyranny of the crozier has been substituted the tyranny of the pill, not that naïve, independent little family bolus of yore which even a layman might administer, but the whole great system of medicine which has become more and more specialized into the hands of the medical hierarchy, who, as the priests did before them, more and more force the laity to receive salvation only through their hands and frown upon individual judgment. The doctors receive more real and more intimate confessions than are made in church, and the average layman is more dominated by his medical director than by his spiritual pastor. While the churches cry aloud for frequenters and go to the highways and hedges to compel congregations to come in, with inducements of instruction, amusement and alms as a bribe to fill empty fanes, the offices of the doctors are besieged all the days of the week. Hospitals and sanitariums command millions for their ever-growing demands, while the Ladies' Aid Societies take in sewing to pay off mortgages on the churches. The priests starve, while the medical specialists make fortunes. A new serum or a new bacteriological discovery is announced in big head-lines on the front page of the newspapers as pre-eminently important news, and great physicians sit in the councils of Government and dictate laws, as did bishops and cardinals in the Middle Ages. The doctor and his devoted acolyte, the trained nurse, officiate more and more absolutely between the laity and the sources of bodily salvation. One hardly dares put on a bit of court-plaster for one's self, and the mind of the world, obsessed by a universal hypochondria, is as concerned with the subtleties of hygiene and diet as was the mind of the past with the mysteries of grace and free will.

Just as in the past the physicians of the soul set up a barrier between the layman and the fount of spiritual healing, demanding that all approach to the deity should be made through their official agency, so the doctors assume that it is better that one should perish under official auspices than recover by heretical means. For though they are supposedly the leaders of progress and scientific thought, the temptations of great power are as potent to them as to the ecclesiastic, and obstinacy and bigotry set the same pitfalls for their feet. They are as prone as were the bishops to feel that all advance emanating from outside of their hierarchy is dangerous, and they yield as reluctantly to new ways of reaching the old ends.

As the Renaissance awoke doubt and unrest in matters spiritual, so in matters of bodily health the world is now seething with revolt and heresy. Mankind will not allow any hierarchy wholly to dominate its search for salvation. No doubt the majority of the medical faculty are skilful and high-minded men, as it is safe to believe the bulk of the ecclesiastics were virtuous and pious at the period of the Reformation, yet undeniable abuses crept into the Church as a result of unbridled domination, and the Reformation was needed to correct them. The Church, in answer to its critics, could point to its thousands of humble parish priests, pious, charitable, virtuous; as medicine can suggest its multitude of kind, honest, helpful country doctors. It could, like the doctors, speak of its multitudes of doles to the poor, and recall its brave missionary martyrs who died in exile for the faith, as missionary doctors die martyrs in exploring the uncharted lands of new remedies. Yet all this was not enough in the Church, nor is it enough in medicine, and the reformation must certainly come, though the medical faculty see the need of it no more than the priests did. Then, as now, the outward conformity was almost complete, and the priest never appeared more powerful and secure. He saw no more menace in the cynical proverbs current among the people than the doctor does in the many bitter sayings among the laymen, such as the oft-quoted, "The operation was a brilliant success, though, of course, the patient died"; nor did he attribute any more importance than the doctor does to the stories that pass *sotto voce* from lip to lip in bitter but smothered indignation. Stories of ignorance, of carelessness, of medical dishonesty or obstinacy, of reckless experi-

mentation upon patients, and more than all of the professional etiquette that for "the honor of the profession" covers up unpardonable mistakes. The medical profession, as a whole, is so justly powerful and respected that it is difficult to find a public opportunity to point out that it, no more than lawyers or clergymen, should be above criticism; and the profession itself is as impatient of any question, any *lésé*-medicine, as were the pre-Reformation priests.

But, after all, the world at large is concerned not nearly so much with the reputation of a class of men as with the safety of its own health and life, and it is demonstrating in many ways that it will seek its own good regardless of all professions. It has not forgotten that both Harvey and Jenner felt the weight of medical opposition, and that almost every attempt to find new paths of escape from disease has met the combined opposition of the doctors until the public forced an acceptance. Homeopathy still remains a schism, though it is owing to its tenets that the old *régime* of cupping, bleeding, blistering, drenching and purging has been profoundly ameliorated and modified. Fifty years ago a young Southern doctor was driven from New York into obscurity by the united violence of medical disapproval, because he was experimenting with a system of rubbings in certain cases, and thereafter he only dared practise his theories in secret. Yet to-day massage is accepted as a valuable adjunct to surgery and drugs.

The heresy of Christian Science has flourished so exceedingly that the Church is beginning to adopt it as a new claim upon the reluctant multitude, and medicine, bullied out of its blind opposition by the public, is at last undertaking to cut away the superstitions and avail itself of the valuable elements of the mental therapy that lie at the core of it. The old magnetic healer now has his rival in the regular school of medicine, who finds that hypnotism is a powerful addition to drugs in some cases, and even the Fletcher system of diet and mastication has forced itself upon the doctor's notice. The bitterest fight of all has been made against the osteopaths, who, in spite of the road having been contested inch by inch, have induced more than half the States to legalize their practice, to examine them through the same State Medical Boards which examine the regular physicians ere permitting them to practise, and to place osteopaths be-

fore the law in an equal position with the "regular" school. This has been dictated to the legislators, in spite of the furious opposition of the doctors, by the public, convinced by demonstration of the value of this new therapy. Yet the regular physicians still decline to recognize the osteopaths, refuse to permit them to practise in any hospital, or to call any trained nurse who attends an osteopathic patient, in spite of which the schools of this new system cannot train its practitioners rapidly enough to supply the demand.

That the Holy Office of medical prejudice has had its uses in suppressing fantastic quacks, as wrong-headed and dangerous as the religious fanatics of the Middle Ages, only proves the above-mentioned contention that men usually begin with a desire to seek truth and justice, but that, given great power, the temptation to tyranny is well-nigh unescapable. More candid, more open-minded, less given to hierarchical solidity and bigotry, the physicians would avoid the errors of the Church's example and avail themselves of what was sane and valuable in these new discoveries, instead of forcing continual schisms by reckless opposition to all advance and change not inaugurated under their own auspices.

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